



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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## UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

14 April 2021

### Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict

**Statement on behalf of Australia delivered by H.E. The Hon. Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations**

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Australia thanks Viet Nam for its ongoing leadership on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda – both at the UN Security Council and as 2020 ASEAN Chair. Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's analysis and recommendations presented in his recent report on conflict-related sexual violence.

The WPS agenda remains crucial to meaningfully addressing sexual violence in conflict. It recognises the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, and that gender inequality is a critical indicator of a country's risk of conflict and a direct cause of sexual violence. As the Secretary-General noted in his report, rebuilding better must integrate the voices and experiences of survivors who have suffered the effects of intersecting crises. We strongly encourage all parties to include these diverse voices in peacebuilding efforts, including of Afghan women in the various processes underway. Women are powerful agents of change and their full,

equal, and meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making is essential to sustainable peace.

Australia remains deeply concerned that armed groups are using sexual violence as a tactic of war, particularly against women and girls; human rights defenders; and individuals based on perceived political affiliation, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. During COVID-19, the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence has been even more acute for those living in conflict, crisis, and humanitarian settings, with increased risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Survivors' access to support services has concurrently been limited by lockdown measures, and the diversion of dedicated resources has compounded existing gendered institutional, structural, and socioeconomic disadvantages.

A pervasive climate of impunity prevents survivors from reporting and accessing justice. We must build systems to hold perpetrators to account in a timely manner and reinforce the rule of law. Australia remains an active and steadfast advocate for this across international forums, including regarding past and recent atrocities of the conflict in Myanmar. We strongly urge action to bring perpetrators of sexual violence to justice in this conflict and others where abuses occur.

Our response must promote and protect women's and girls' rights. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights of central importance for all people in conflict and humanitarian settings, particularly for survivors of sexual violence. Access to the full range of support, including psychosocial, legal and sexual, reproductive and other health services, is critical for survivors' recovery, dignity and bodily autonomy.

Our actions must be survivor-centred and recognise the diversity of experiences and needs. They must not revictimise or retraumatise survivors seeking redress or remedy. For example, children born of rape, and their mothers, have particular needs and male survivors, including boys, have their own barriers to accessing services.

Gender advisors in peace operations are critical to promoting gender-sensitive planning, resourcing, and operations, and to advancing prevention, protection, compliance, accountability, and justice for survivors. As at end of January 2021, Australia has trained over 290 military and civilian gender advisers for deployment on military, humanitarian, relief, and recovery operations. We also support the Elsie Initiative, promoting the meaningful representation of uniformed women across all levels of UN peace operations.

Australia is proud to work with diverse civil society organisations, multilateral institutions, academia, and our regional and global partners to address sexual violence in conflict. We have promoted innovative practices such as the PeaceFem App, mapping gender provisions in peace agreements to ensure that practitioners effectively negotiate and integrate gender considerations into peace processes, including services and justice for sexual violence.

We are pleased to continue to fund UN Women's WPS Global Facility and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, to support those working on the frontlines of conflict and crises to advance gender equality and the WPS

agenda. We commend the UN for its own ongoing implementation of the WPS and Youth, Peace and Security agendas.

Australia is a proud founding member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and a leader in supporting crisis-affected communities with lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services and supplies, through partners including International Planned Parenthood Federation and the UNFPA. We also advocate to preserve and strengthen international commitments for sexual and reproductive health and rights through our co-chairing of the Nexus Initiative Coordinating Committee for 2021.

As COVID-19 exacerbates risks for sexual violence in conflict, Australia continues to champion the rights of survivors, victims and those on the frontlines of conflict, including women human rights defenders. We remain committed to the WPS agenda and our collective efforts to combat sexual violence in conflict as a pathway to sustainable peace and security.

Thank you.